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Inside Washington

Clark Verification Panel May Head off Summit

Efforts by the State Department's Lawrence Eagleburger, White House aide Mike Deaver and others in the Administration to pave the way for a Ronald Reagan-Yuri Andropov summit next year have run into a possible snag: the President's establishment of a strategic arms verification panel under the chairmanship of National Security Adviser William P. Clark.

According to informed Administration officials, the Clark panel, which consists of policy level representatives and analysts from State, Defense, the Joint Chiefs and the intelligence agencies, is thoroughly investigating at least three major potential SALT I and SALT II violations. These sources maintain that the panel's conclusions—which may come as early as next month—are likely to have major repercussions on U.S. policy.

At least one official intimately acquainted with the information coming before the Clark group told us: "The practices of gross deception and concealment by the Soviets, combined with their crude responses to our legitimate concerns, are such that no official, senator or anyone else aware of these facts will any longer be able to ignore or excuse Soviet conduct."

Even now, it is contended, such "pragmatic" State Department types as Undersecretary Eagleburger and Assistant Secretary Richard Burt are worried about recent Soviet deceptive nuclear testing practices.

The major concern at the moment is an almost certain violation by the Soviets of the ABM treaty of 1972. Recent satellite photos of a sweep of the

eastern Soviet Union reveal the construction of an immense radar system deep inside the Russian empire. Construction of the new radar complex is believed to violate directly the ABM treaty which prohibits any deployment of an ABM system capable of actually protecting either the U.S. or the USSR from an offensive missile assault.

Indeed, the very purpose of the ABM treaty was to prevent either country from building an anti-missile system on the grounds that neither nation would then dare attack the other since both sides would be left entirely vulnerable to a counter assault.

Examining the nature of the potential ABM violations, the Heritage Foundation, which possesses excellent defense and security contacts, recently observed:

"[The new radar system] closes the gap of coverage against incoming U.S. land- and sea-based missiles targeted against eastern Soviet territory and, together with already existing radar sites, will soon enable the Soviets to mount a formidable anti-ballistic missile defense against a retaliatory strike by the United States."

Combined with the growing Soviet first-strike capabilities against our strategic deterrent (including land-based missiles, bombers and submarines) and a vigorous civil defense effort, "it becomes apparent," said Heritage, "that the Soviets are on the verge of acquiring all major elements for the potential to wage nuclear war against the United States at tolerable costs."

The potential ABM violation is the most serious of this nation's concerns, but there are two other possible violations that are also deeply troubling. The SALT II treaty allows only one new type of ICBM to be developed by either side. The Soviets designated the PL-4 of last year as their new missile. But then, this spring, the U.S. discovered that the Soviets were testing still another new long-range missile, the PL-5.

The Soviets claimed this was just a follow-on to the old SS-13, but U.S. intelligence sources insisted that the PL-5, in the words of Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R.-Wyo.), a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, differed in throw-weight by more than 200 per cent from the SS-13. The Soviets, according to the highest U.S. sources,

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have not yet been able to convince the American intelligence community that the PL-5 is not an entirely new missile.

The third potential serious violation surrounds the allegation that the Soviets—again in violation of SALT II—have developed and deployed a mobile missile, the SS-16.

What is fascinating about all this is that at the very moment the Clark panel is considering concluding that the Soviets have almost certainly violated both the letter and the spirit of the previous SALT agreements, the Soviets, in the new strategic arms discussions (START), are stubbornly refusing to discuss verification in any meaningful way.

HUMAN EVENTS asked a top arms controller about what the Soviets and the U.S. might have agreed to in our recent START negotiations. This key expert informed us:

"What I can tell you about verification is that we have tried to get the Soviets talking about verification at every step, . . . and so on. We have tried to engage them in verification discussions, and they've said, no, no, let's put that off until later."

This same source also says they have continued to resist adamantly the idea of on-site inspections, though President Reagan once suggested this was the only way you could really detect the number of warheads the Soviets had in each missile.

The Soviet attitude toward verification at START is just part of the overall pattern of conduct the Russians have exhibited when getting into the subject of verifying past or future arms agreements. So far, they have been able to conceal their secretive atomic weapons developments without fear of U.S. reprisals.

The Clark panel, however, could alter the course of history. For the first time, an authoritative government body may formally spell out the Soviet violations of both the spirit and the letter of the strategic arms agreements. And the repercussions may turn out to be even greater than the killing of a possible summit in the spring or summer of election year '84.